

The Gauze Fluffer

BY WILLIAM SLAVENS McNUTT

A Bear, a Booking Agent, a Hidden Past, and Several Other Things Combined With Action and Humor

PAT MAHONEY stood in the wings beside the stage manager and stared admiringly at the strangely moving figure of Mademoiselle Sylvia. Enveloped by voluminous folds of gauzy stuff, Mademoiselle Sylvia was doing complicated daily dozen in more or less time to the music made by the Elite Theater Orchestra.

"She's class, ain't she?" said Pat admiringly.

The stage manager stared at him "What are you trying to do, kid me?" he asked in an unfriendly tone.

"No, I'm not trying to kid you," said Mahoney, nettled. "I'm telling you something. I said the young lady out there has class, and that's good."

"That's your story," said the stage manager. "Now listen to mine. I've seen many a gauze fluffer in my time, and never seen one yet that was any good. Some are bad and some are worse. That dame out there now, picking up her feet and putting them down, is the worst. You call her a young lady, but she ain't young, and she's maybe a lady, though I doubt it, and there ain't any class to her."

"You're a liar," said Mahoney hotly.

"Say," said the manager, "that's a fighting word around here."

"It is," said Mahoney. "Then let's fight!"

He smacked the stage manager on the nose, and the stage manager retaliated by smacking him in the eye. They clinched their hands and fell to the floor and rolled over and over. By this time other performers and stage hands were rushing toward them. Before any one could reach the struggling pair they had stumbled erect, swayed, tumbled, and banged hard against the cage containing Professor Tomasselli's trained bear. The door of the cage was closed and bolted, but not locked. The jar of the fighting pair, falling against the framework loosened the bolt, and when they rolled away from the cage the door came open.

"Woof!" said the big brown occupant in a pleased tone and walked out.

The performers and stage hands who had been approaching with the idea of stopping the fight turned and went rapidly away from there, not caring a whoop in a heavy thunder-storm. When the fighting was over stopped or not.

"Woof!" the big brown bear repeated and ambled leisurely over to sniff at the two squirming forms that were performing so strangely. The stage manager, fighting on one hand loose, made a wild grab to get Mahoney by the hair, and grabbed the bear by the nose instead.

"Yow!" cried the stage manager.

He shook himself free and in a second he was well up a ladder leading to the flies and wondering what detained Mahoney.

At about the same moment Mahoney, looking furiously about to see what had become of the stage manager, peeked into the eyes and mouth of the bear that had spoiled the fight.

The bear's eyes were less than a foot from Mahoney's face; the bear's mouth was open, and Mahoney noted that the sharp teeth were long and yellow and capable looking.

"Woof!" said the bear, growling more.

Mr. Mahoney said nothing. Action was his answer to the bear's remark, and in no time at all Mr. Mahoney stood on the ladder just below his late opponent's feet.

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JUST at this moment the orchestra stopped playing, and two or three people in the audience applauded enthusiastically. Mlle. Sylvia's act was at an end. She came off, bowing her way backward until she reached the wings, and then turned around and almost bumped face on the big brown bear.

"Woof!" said the bear pleasantly.

"Eeeeeee!" said Mlle. Sylvia and crumpled up in a faint.

"Oh, Lord!" said Pat Mahoney and loosening his hold on the laddered, leaped to the floor.

"Woof!" said the bear, facing him.

"Seat you!" said Mahoney, advancing on him with his fists up. "Get out! Beat it!"

"Woof!" said the bear.

Mahoney said a little prayer in his mind and smacked the bear on the nose with a left jab.

"Woof!" said the bear aggrievedly, backing up. "Woof! Woof! Woof!"

He shook his head pathetically, ambled dejectedly to his cage, crawled in and to make absolutely sure that no ill-natured humans would bother him further, caught the door with one paw and slammed it shut after him.

"Woof!" he said spiritlessly as a parting tribute to the conversation. "Woof."

"Hey, you!" the stage manager called to Mahoney. "Get a move on! They're playing your stuff."

Mahoney saw that some other performers were caring for Mlle. Sylvia, and he cocked his hat on one side of his head, shook himself into his stage personality, and went humming and clogging out in front of the footlights to do his stuff.

Now, Pat Mahoney's stuff was rough but funny, vulgar but effective. It forced even the majority of the judicious to reluctant grins, and it certainly went big with the groundlings. Pat had the feet of a genius and the appearance of a New York gangster. He danced divinely and did it with his hat cocked over one eye, his hands in his pockets, and the general manner and expression of a tough stick-up guy on a vacation and looking for trouble just to make things feel homely.

He was a quick card, was Pat. His act was always billed as the Mahoney Brothers. Pat was the original and only Mahoney, but he always hired a partner who worked with him, and whoever he secured immediately became for professional purposes the other Mahoney.

There was no real reason for Pat to have a partner. He had plenty of stuff to work single, but Pat had an inferiority complex, thought the stuff he did was terrible hokum, and never could understand how and why it got across.

So he always had a partner to help him out. None of them was ever any help to him except to give him a chance to catch his breath between dances, but Pat didn't know this.

It was because of a partner that

Pat was playing the string of comparatively small time through up-state New York, breaking in a new Mahoney.

The audience roared its approval as he finished his first number.

"The boos," he muttered to himself as he bowed and smiled. "They never give her a hand, and then they fall for this rough-house hokum and hooting of mine. They don't know when they see it."

AS HE bowed himself off to give his partner a chance to do a ten-cent solo when was to play back some place, he saw Prof. Tomasselli standing near the bear's cage. He started toward the professor with the idea of giving him a mild call-down for going away and leaving the cage door unlocked. The professor advanced to meet him and beat him to the speech.

"What for are you busta my bear in da snoot?" he demanded, brandishing both clenched fists in eccentric circles.

"What for did I bust him?" said Mahoney, amazed. "Why, you misplaced fruit peddler, are you tryin' to give me a call-down for hittin' a full-grown bear in the nose with my fist? Why? say! Men get medals for that."

"He's a nice gooda bear," said the professor, dancing with rage. "He's no scratch; he's no bite; he's no do something bad to anybody. You busta my bear, I'm goin' to busta you in the nose!"

He stepped in quickly and made good on this threat and jumped back before Mahoney could counter. Mahoney gave a yell of rage and started after him. The Italian squealed with fright and scuttled for the stage door, with Mahoney at his heels. Out into the alley they raced and around the corner.

Two minutes passed and no Mahoney. His partner finished his song and bowed himself off. The orchestra played Mahoney's cue music for his entrance and then played it again, still no Mahoney. The frantic stage manager shone on a monologist to stop the stage work. The house manager came running back stage, demanding explanations.

"The gauze fluffer started the whole fuss," said the stage manager, and proceeded to explain according to his prejudices.

Ten minutes later Mahoney rushed in panting, and holding a well-defined handkerchief to his nose.

"The dirty Wop hopped a truck and kicked me in the face when I tried to climb on after him," he said wrathfully.

"Oh, is that so?" said the stage manager. "And what do you think may you swell people are. You never like to talk about yourself. There's just one thing I'd like to tell you, though, if you won't get mad. Promise not to?"

"Yes," she said reluctantly.

"It's just this," said Pat. "If I didn't know you was a real, sure enough high-up I'd make an awful play for you."

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THIS attraction for contrasts may have been responsible for the fact that Pat Mahoney and Mademoiselle Sylvia became good friends during the course of the next two weeks. Pat attended her with all the frank joy of a stray mongrel pup following a new-found master.

And so, when disaster befell Mademoiselle Sylvia, she went to Pat with her trouble and told him of it in a small voice while her lips quivered and tears stood in her eyes.

She had received a curt note from the booking office, saying that the reports on her act had been uniformly unfavorable and that they would be unable to give her any more time.

"You're over their heads," said Pat consolingly. "You're too good for this small time. Why, say! I'll bet if you was playin' the big houses you'd be topin' the bill right along."

"Oh," said Pat. "Well, what's the story?"

"She comes from swell folks," said Pat confidentially.

"Yeah?" said Buscovar.

"Do you have, let's hear it and I'll tell you whether it's good enough to give you a chance or not."

Mlle. Sylvia wet her lips with the tip of her tongue nervously and started to speak twice before the words came. "What—what kind of a story do you want?" she asked.

"Sell me that idea!" said Buscovar derisively. "Do that first, an' if you get away with it I promise to pay you something down for an option on the Brooklyn bridge."

"There's a story in her that'd make great publicity," said Mahoney.

"Yes?" said Buscovar. "What is it?"

"I don't know," said Mahoney.

"That's a great story," said Buscovar solemnly. "That ought to dirty up the front page of every paper in New York. I can see it now. Stage Mystery. Gauze Fluffer Has Great Story. But No One Knows What It Is. Everybody in Town Stop Work and Guess! Wonderful, Pat! You ought to quit the stage and turn press agent!"

"I don't know," said Mahoney.

"That's a great story," said Buscovar.

"Yes?" said Buscovar. "What is it?"

"I mean I know there's a great story in her, but I ain't found out just what it is yet," Pat explained.

"I know in a general way, but I ain't got all the details yet."

"Oh," said Buscovar. "Details! I knew there was something lacking Well, what's the story?"

"She comes from swell folks," said Pat confidentially.

"Yeah?" said Buscovar.

"Do you have, let's hear it and I'll tell you whether it's good enough to give you a chance or not."

Mlle. Sylvia covered her face with her hands. "I can't do it."

A characteristically skeptical grin appeared on Buscovar's fat face. Pat expressed only amazed alarm.

"Why, what's the matter?" he exclaimed.

"I thought maybe I could think up something you haven't told me, Pat, and maybe you have just got a good hunch. Anyhow, you're so sure to tell me whether it's good enough to give you a chance or not."

Mlle. Sylvia wet her lips with the tip of her tongue nervously and started to speak twice before the words came. "What—what kind of a story do you want?" she asked.

"Sell me that idea!" said Buscovar.

"Do that first, an' if you get away with it I'll tell you whether it's good enough to give you a chance or not."

Mlle. Sylvia turned to Buscovar. "If I tell you will you get me plenty of engagements on the big time?" she asked.

"Sure," said Buscovar. "If it's a good story and we can get lots of publicity on it, why not?"

"Will you give me tonight to think it over?" Mlle. Sylvia asked.

Buscovar pursed his lips.

"I ought to get back to New York this evening," he said. "Still—well, all right. Then in the morning, miss, you will let me know for sure if you can tell me the story or not, hey?"

"Yes," said Mlle. Sylvia, "In the morning."

"It's a good story, isn't it?" said Buscovar.

"I would hate to wait here all night and then have you tell me you was just a daughter of some fellow that had a couple hundred thousand dollars and didn't amount to nothing. Of course, if your father was maybe a senator or any kind of a big public man that the people know about, that would be all right, even if he didn't have so much money."

"I'll let you know about it in the morning," Mlle. Sylvia said faintly.

"And they would laugh, hey?" said Buscovar.

"They would sit and laugh at you?"

"Yes," said Mlle. Sylvia, beginning to sob again. "Oh, I'm through! I'm a failure! People have always told me that you was nobody. That's true. I just nobody! I worked on the farm until I was sixteen without even the hope of ever doing anything else. And when Priscilla Parsons came to stay with us."

"But how?" Those who have paused to ask that question may have found partial answers in many quarters.

Knowledge has been broadened, machinery has lifted tremendous burdens from the backs of men, and governments have learned that it is national economy to protect their manpower through wise legislation.

All of these things have contributed, but the greatest contributions were made by the men and women who studied and toiled, unnoticed and unsung, in the solitude of the research laboratories, burning low the oil of their own lives, looking for answers to the great questions of life, its origin and its needs.

The department of embryology of the Carnegie Institution of Washington occupies part of one of the buildings belonging to Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, and was located there because its proximity to one of the world's greatest medical schools would be decidedly advantageous.

Twenty years ago few men had more

than a fragmentary understanding of the true conditions under which life developed.

Vital questions yet remain to be answered, but today knowledge in that direction has progressed to the point where it is quite common for one of the specialists attached to the department of embryology to make wax duplicates of many parts of a human body even before that part has begun to assume a recognizable shape or appearance.

It was while being shown through this section that one visitor met an old friend. The old friend was none other than Pongo the orangutan that was once a favorite resident of the Zoo Park here. Pongo died last winter from rickets and his body was sent to Baltimore to be studied by scientists. A cast of his head was made by Dr. A. H. Schultz as a permanent record preliminary to the dissection of the body. By this time every nerve and muscle in poor Pongo's body had been examined microscopically and the results included in the notes of science.

There is yet another and highly

important phase of the work of the department of embryology of the Carnegie Institution. It concerns re-

searches into the formation and ac-

tion of the living tissues, the bits of life which, pieced together, make the whole of us. This study is being carried on, not only through exper-

iments on real living tissue, but also

through the medium of the camera.

Dr. Warren H. Lewis has charge of

that particular department, and he is

assisted in his work by his wife. Thus

far Dr. Lewis has carried on ex-

periments chiefly with tissues of em-

bryo chicks, but has also devoted his

attention to mammalian tissues, in-

cluding human lymph glands, tis-

sues of which seem to grow quite as

well under these conditions as in

their normal environment.

Dr. George L. Streeter is director of

the